

What's it all about?

During the past 100 years, the average age of puberty dropped from 17 to 13 years old. Consequently, today's teens have the sexually mature bodies and sexual feelings of adults before they are emotionally and intellectually ready for sexual intercourse.

What are the details?

- Most very young teens have not had intercourse.
 8 in 10 girls and 7 in 10 boys are sexually inexperienced at age 15.
- Though the likelihood of teens having intercourse increases steadily with age, about 1 in 5 young people do not have intercourse while teenagers.
- The younger a woman is when she first has sexual intercourse, the more likely it is to have been unwanted or involuntary. About 4 in 10 women who first had intercourse at age 13 or 14 say it was unwanted or involuntary.
- Nearly two-thirds of sexually active 15–17-year-old women have partners who are within 2 years of their age;
 29% have sexual partners who are 3–5 years older and 7% have partners who are 6 or more years older. Most sexually active young men have female partners close to their age.

teenage sexual behavior

INFORMATION FOR ADULTS WHO CARE ABOUT TEENS

Why does it matter?

- Peers are important to teens. As they grow, teens look to their friends for advice, support and a sense of belonging —a sense they once got from home.
- Teens believe myths. Two of the big myths are that "everyone is having sex," and "using birth control is bad or at least unromantic." So to fit in, teens may have sex or not use birth control.
- The "double standard." For teen girls, much of their status still depends on being attractive and having a boyfriend. Boys' status is affected by their ability to perform and appear interested in sex.
- Conflicting messages from adults. Many adults believe teens should not have sexual intercourse, but this is frequently at odds with the social environment in which teens are growing up. TV, magazines, movies, and music all tell teens that sex is romantic, exciting, risky and a mark of adulthood. Teens are told that sex before marriage is bad or wrong. Yet at the same time, their own parents or other adults they know may be living together without marriage. Some adults avoid talking to their children about sexual information, including contraception, for fear it will encourage teens' sexual activity.
- Teens are at risk for sexually transmitted diseases. In 1999 more than 5,500 teens in Washington had a reported STD.





TEENAGE SEXUAL BEHAVIOR INFORMATION FOR ADULTS WHO CARE ABOUT TEENS

What can I do?

Studies indicate that clear, strong messages from parents are critical. Yet many parents say that talking about sexuality with their teens is one of the hardest things they have faced. Here are some tips to get the ball rolling:

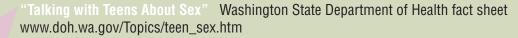
- Show you are accepting and understanding. Try to listent before giving advice. Let teens know they can trust you and come to you, even when they make mistakes.
- Talk to teens on an ongoing basis before problems arise. Start conversations instead of waiting for questions.
- Share your values, beliefs and concerns with your children. They need to know where you stand.
- Before age 14, give teens accurate information about intercourse, birth control, sexually transmitted diseases, body parts, feelings and relationships. They need information. Knowledge is not harmful.
- Talk to boys about girls' development and to girls about boys' development. They need to know about both male and female bodies, feelings and responsibilities.
- Encourage teens to express how they are feeling. Be ready to hear opinions you may not agree with.
- Inform teens about sexual abuse just like you would other dangers. This is a safety issue. Let them know that you think it is wrong for people to expect sex in return for attention, favors or compliments.

Sexuality education . . . does it matter?

No single approach to talking about sex with teens is appropriate for all adolescents in all circumstances and in every community. It is clear, however, that certain things can make an impact.

All teens need sexuality education that teaches them refusal and negotiation skills and gives them up-to-date information about birth control and sexually transmitted diseases before they are sexually active.

In a recent review of evaluated prevention programs, the Institute of Medicine found that "sexuality education programs that provide information on both abstinence and contraceptive use neither encourage the onset of sexual intercourse nor increase the frequency of intercourse among adolescents...programs that provide both messages appear effective in delaying the onset of sexual intercourse and encouraging contraceptive use once sexual activity has begun, especially among younger adolescents."



Sexuality Information and Education Council of the United States www.siecus.org

Facts In Brief: Teen Sex and Pregnancy The Alan Guttmacher Institute www.agi-usa.org/pubs/fb_teen_sex.html

Washington State Youth Risk Behavior Survey 1999 published August 2000 by the Washington State Department of Health, www.doh.wa.gov/publicat/publications.htm

Teen Health and the Media www.teenhealthandthemedia.net

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